

INFORMATION FOR THE PRESS

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FEDERAL AGENTS DESTROY NEARLY 500 DUCK TRAPS IN MARYLAND, VIRGINIA

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Federal game-law enforcement agents of the U. S. Biological Survey during the past three months have confiscated and destroyed nearly 500 wild duck traps on Maryland and Virginia marshes in and along the Chesapeake Bay and along Chincoteague Bay on the Atlantic Coast in an effort to stamp out the illegal practice of trapping and marketing waterfowl. Most of the ducks caught by trappers in this section, explains the Survey, are bought by "duck bootleggers" who in turn sell them in large eastern cities.

Duck trapping is illegal. Regulations under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, specifying methods for taking waterfowl, permit the use only of shotguns not larger than No. 10 gauge and not holding more than three shells. Baiting to attract waterfowl and sale or purchase of these birds without government permit are also illegal.

About half of the traps seized in Maryland and Virginia this season were found on Smith Island in Chesapeake Bay and in the Chesconnessex marshes on the eastern shore of Virginia, and the others in Chincoteague Bay. Hundreds of ducks -- mostly pintails, mallards, and black ducks -- were liberated from the traps by the Federal agents after being banded for further study of their migratory habits. The traps built of poultry wire and wooden stakes were about 5 by 6 feet in size and capable of catching 40 to 50 ducks in a single night. Corn bait is used to lure the birds into the traps.

"The taking of waterfowl by these illegal methods," says Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, Chief of the Survey, "means that thousands of waterfowl that spend part or most of the winter in this section never return the following spring to their northern breeding grounds to produce more young. Regulations governing the taking of waterfowl have been stringent in recent years in order that more birds might return to the breeding grounds, and thereby bring about a quicker realization of the objectives of the national waterfowl restoration program. A few years ago the waterfowl were declining rapidly in numbers, but during the past two seasons the decline has been checked and once again increasing flights are familiar sights."

In spite of their small numbers, Federal game-law enforcement agents have managed to break up the illegal market hunting practice to a large extent on the west coast and in the Middle West, where it once flourished. Progress is also being made on the East Coast in breaking up this practice, but much work still remains to be done. The cooperation of sportsmen, State game and police officials, and others has helped the Federal agents greatly in their work. In Maryland, for example, the Federal agents are being assisted by State game and police officials. The U. S. Coast Guard also cooperates with the agents.

Most of the Federal agents are now engaged in curbing post-season violations of waterfowl regulations. They are so organized that they can shift quickly to any section where violations are reported. In spring when the birds migrate back north the agents are also on hand to protect them against illegal gunners.

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